

Lake County News Sun, September 9, 2008

METTAWA -- Straight from the horse's mouth -- double-deck horse trailers have to go.

Standing nose to nose with a champion Hanoverian thoroughbred Monday at Shadow Brook Farms, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk said bipartisan legislation he has introduced will end tragedies like the crash in Wadsworth last fall that killed 19 horses.

"We know that about once a year an accident on the scale of the Wadsworth crash occurs in the United States," Kirk said. "Congress needs to ban double-deck trailers for the transportation of horses to prevent future tragedies."

Kirk was joined by animal welfare and equestrian proponents as he outlined the Horse Transportation Safety Act of 2008, which would prohibit interstate transportation of horses in a vehicle containing two or more levels stacked on top of one another.

The act provides fines for each violation.

Donna Ewing, president of the Barrington-based Hooved Animal Rescue and Protection Society, said the legislation is needed to prevent scenes "like that horrible night in Wadsworth."

On Oct. 29, a double-deck trailer carrying 59 Belgian draft horses from Indiana to Minnesota flipped near the intersection of Route 41 and Wadsworth road. Ewing helped rescue many of the horses that survived.

Ewing and others said the weight of horses, and their top-heavy nature, make the equine use of double-deck trailers designed for other livestock a recipe for flip-over disasters.

"All you're asking for is tragedy," Ewing said.

Jordan Matyas, Illinois director of the Humane Society of the United States, said double-deck carriers cause horses to lose their balance and to crane their necks in awkward and uncomfortable positions, often for long periods of time.

"The tragedy in Wadsworth shouldn't have happened," said Shadow Brook Farm owner Tim Towne. "Those trailers are not meant for transporting horses. They are made for transporting other livestock. When you put horses in a double-decker, it's an accident waiting to happen."

Kirk said he doesn't not expect the legislation to be called out of committee this year, but hopes that it will be approved by Congress next year. He stressed that the legislation is a bipartisan effort with an equal number of Republican and Democratic sponsors.